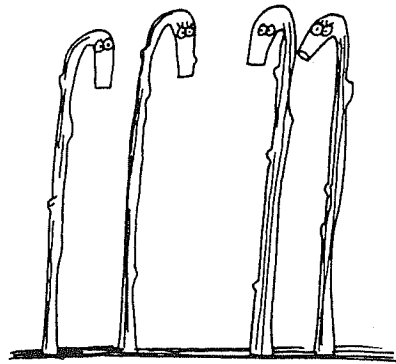


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MULTIPLE STAFF MINISTRY: in the Dawning Age of a New Ministry



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MULTIPLE STAFF MINISTRY: in the dawning age of a new ministry

Staff ministry isn't a new concept. The staff ministry concept is as old as Scripture. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, had a good grasp of multiple staff ministry. Moses took his advice and set up 70 leaders to handle lesser cases while he took up the more important cases. Jesus used multiple staff ministry when he sent out the 70 by twos. Paul and Barnabas would also fit under staff ministry. The point being, we needn't be shocked when someone starts talking about a multiple staff in connection with completing the mission of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In fact that's kind of what the Lord is saying with the great commission and what Luther later reemphasizes in his teaching of the universal priesthood of all believers. All believers are to be about their Father's business. The misconception that Matthew 28 refers only to the pastor has a strong influence in congregations today, but it's not as common as it was as recently as the late 1970's.

In contrast to the staff ministry is the single pastor or the monepiscopacy. We didn't have a monoepiscopate until the 3rd century. The truth is, you won't find a biblical illustration of a single pastor. They're all teams. You'll have headship, but you won't have singular headship or leadership. The important thing to remember about the single pastor today is that his basic method of ministry is taken from a method that developed in rural Europe, in a small country church setting, with tightknit families, over a century ago.

Today's society, on the other hand, has changed rapidly in recent years. Our society is new. For example the structure of the family is different. Families, not all mind you, but on the whole, are not as functional as they were 15 years ago. They don't provide the emotional and spiritual stability that they once did. The pace of living is faster. Consequently the average family spends only 38 minutes in meaningful conversation every week, and the average father spends only 37 seconds a day talking with his children. Families are so busy that the church today finds itself competing for time. Society is rapidly changing at a pace heretofore unknown to history. The ramifications effect our economy, our activities, our families, and our churches.

As recently as 20 years ago God's people were being ministered to (with the multiple staff as well as the monepiscopate) and their needs were being met. Society has changed all that. Twenty years ago the minister basically married, buried, baptized, and confirmed along with hospital and shut-in calls. But today the ministry is multi-diversified. Today a pastor has to do all of the above plus he has to develop family ministry, marriage counseling, church oriented Bible study and activities, evangelism, out reach ministries, and be program director for the family body. One man can't do all that. He's only got two arms, two hands, a head, and a body, and he's given the same hours in a week as every one else.

One solution to this is to get another man. He takes half of the hospital calls, he takes the meeting devotions every other month, and he helps out with preaching. All this solution does is lighten the load of the man who would ordinarily do it alone. So all you're doing

is just making the whole load easier but you're not carrying out the total concept of ministry as the 1980's demands it.

If we're going to accept Christ's objectives in our field we have to approach our ministry in the large congregation in a different way. There's just no way in a large congregation that you can do anything but preach, marry, bury, and do the very minimums. One of the problems is that our concept of ministry is rooted in rural Europe where you have basically a small congregation gathered around one shepherd. One key that led to the pastor's effectiveness in rural Europe was that he was able to work with this small congregation on the basis of strong personal relationships. You can still do that today, but by the time the congregation reaches 100 members the personal touch starts to taper off. By 200 you are just about to your limit. When you go over that you start losing quickly. Beyond 200 you get the law of deminishing returns. Deminishing returns means people who are less excited about the work, have less of a sense of direction about the work of the Lord, become more concerned about their own personal things, a deterioration of what it means to be God's people and church becomes an adjunct to their lives. You end up with a large congregation with no Bible class, no time to prepare a class and no time to hold it. You get less and less and less and less.

Practically speaking, in the WELS in congregations of 600 or more communicants, there are 729 communicants per pastor on the average. And remember the the WELS have more large churches per member than any other Lutheran church body. What then has happened to the strong personal relationship of pastor to individual members? It

just doesn't exist. That means that the majority of WELS members do not hold a key ingredient to the ministry their pastors are trying to carry out. This, in effect, reduces ministry to bare maintenance levels. Losses of care tend to occur in one or more of the following: outreach, delinquency, family support, elderly care, high school-college youth, adult instruction, training of membership for ministry and counseling. The pastor's life as leader and parent are distorted. Long range planning tends to be neglected. Personal and professional growth become practically nonexistent except for experience (catechism class, sermon preparation etc.). The family has to compete for even a little of its father's time. Overwork becomes chronic. Even basic care at major turning points such as death, marriage, or birth is reduced to minimum levels. Leadership needs are not fully met. People aren't told how to serve, organize and execute. This results in purposeless meetings, lack of goals clearly understood and agreed to, a lack of individual sense of direction and a lot of frustration and confusion. The net effect is that Christians are easily seduced because they are Scriptural illiterates. Rules replace the more patient evangelical spirit. Form becomes more important than essence. Mission work is stifled or reduced to monetary giving. Membership becomes a revolving door. Leaders become hard to find.

WELS ministry has changed. Most of the large congregations are at idle. They're barely running and their potential is relatively untapped. They struggle to do what they are doing. The fall 1986 *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* sympathizes, "What has happened to 12,616 souls?...It seems apparent that the basic source of numerical

loss is losses 'out the back door.'" It's been hard. We've got good men struggling. Top-flight pastors basically grinding themselves into bits trying to manage a ministry that's changed too radically. We have not adapted the manner in which we pastor a congregation. But things are changing.

The multiple staff in some and even most instances is just an extension of the monepiscopacy. The monepiscopate mind set will be hard to get rid of. It's what we grew up with. It's what we were trained with. It's what we will shape our ministry after. The only problem is, the model doesn't work as well anymore except in limited situations. The trend that is starting in the WELS is a reawakening of the Biblical principles of multiple staff ministry as they were intended to be carried out. The trend is to create a staff of enablers that uses the gifts and talents of the lay people to effect a preventative ministry. Perhaps a more descriptive term for this ministry would be team ministry

One of the qualities of team ministry workers is to have a mind set of a team player. The single largest obstacle to team ministry is a mind set that looks at ministry as a singular activity. Too many seminary graduates are anxiously waiting to be a pastor in a parish. However, it's not that he will be a pastor of a congregation somewhere, but that he will be part of a shepherding team with laymen and other called workers of which he may or may not be the chief leader. The biggest difficulty in working with staff ministry is if you've been geared your whole life to be the head honcho and then all of a sudden you have to gear yourself to a completely different type of ministry. It's not that things won't work out, it's just that it

takes that much more time and even sometimes causes problems. If a man gets a call as Associate or Assistant Pastor, he may feel that his call is secondary. He may feel that not only is his title abbreviated "ass", but that it's more descriptive in its abbreviated form. This doesn't mean the call is any less a call, it just means there is a problem with the man's attitude or mind-set. This problem could also be addressed as an ego problem. Perhaps if the team ministry concept is accepted even the rivalry that exists between some sister WELS congregations can be overcome.

After the challenge of overriding the mind set has been met and beaten there remains one more challenge--money. The truth is, congregations can't afford not to have a multiple staff. People always look at the dollar. They say when the treasury allows it then we'll get another man. They'll often get another grade school teacher as soon as a classroom has more than 21 kids in it without batting an eyelash, but when someone wants to add a 2nd or 3rd pastor, "Oh my, we can't possibly afford that!" If the church is the mother and the school is the daughter then sometimes we take care of the daughter better than the mother. Statistics will show that the new man can pay for himself by the people he brings in or by the people he keeps in that would have otherwise gone away. Many congregations that are waiting to get another man because of financial reasons are unaware, or at least unconvinced, of these findings by their sister congregations throughout the synod. Hopefully they'll catch on in a few years (even though by then we'll be suffering from a lack of pastors again).

One ought not get the impression that team ministry means there

is no head. The Lord, in His good sense, saw it necessary to tier authority in the home, we ought not be so dumb within our ministerium to think that we sinners can operate effectively without headship. In team ministry the administrative head is not more important than another of the ministers, it's just that the congregation has to decide who is going to be responsible for the day to day administration of the institution and who is accountable to the board on behalf of the staff. The issue is not control. The issue is team.

What team ministry encourages is targeted and defined ministries. This is something different. We havent done it a whole lot in our circles but it's catching on. It comes out of the principle of administration that says, "If it's nobody's job it is very hard to get it done."

Team ministry identifies gifts so the talents available can be maximized. The pastors can use those God-given talents and go with them where ever the Lord guides them.

There are evidences that the concept of team ministry is catching on. 1) Peace congregation of Tucson Arizona will be calling a 2nd pastor for it's congregation of 100 members in May of 1988. A congregation of that size calling another man was unheard of 15 years ago. In fact, 15 years ago, if a congregation of 600 were to call a second pastor, people really would have stood up and taken notice. 2) A committee in the Northwest Wisconsin District has been set up to check into the interest for having a summer seminar on multiple staff ministry. All congregations showed interest and about 15 were either in the process of going into staff ministry or were thinking of heading that way. The chairman will be recommending to the Conference

of Presidents that they appoint a Synod committee to organize a seminar. The Southeast and West Wisconsin Districts and the Minnesota District have also shown interest. 3) The Seminary has already offered the grounds to hold the seminar. 4) Churches are coming to the Seminary more and more with a specific division of duties attached to the call. 5) Five vicarships are being assigned to mission congregations instead of established congregations (although there is no doubt that the home mission board allocates money for these things with no intention of looking for qualified people that might end up in the home mission field). 6) We have many more congregations with multiple staff than the national average. Our percentage of congregations with 2 or more staff in a congregation of 250 people is head and shoulders above the rest. 7) There is a new emphasis on realizing spiritual gifts. Seminars are even being conducted. The identification of gifts is a key ingredient to team ministry (these seminars will be more helpful for lay members to see their gifts than, say, for a pastor to see his strengths should he ever become part of a team in a multiple staff church).

If we're going to be effective in the 21st century we're at a very critical point in the church. We are either going to crawl inside ourselves and become a very particulate church where man does his own thing, WELS may become very sectarian, or in the process of all the reexamining that's going on right now, we will grow in a way we never have before. The potential is there. We're at another one of the critical points in the life of our organization. It's a matter of whether we are going to make the adaptation in the future or whether we just crawl in our hole, become narrow, unadaptive, terribly

selfish, taking care of only our own, concerning ourselves only about what we want and what we like, and in the process lose the entire vision and purpose for what Jesus Christ calls us.

It's not easy to work in this direction, because it becomes better. Anything that becomes better the church gets opposed. You will very seldom have problems in a congregation as long as you are not accomplishing anything that's going to defeat Satan. But as soon as you start treading on his territory, he don't like it. It gets harder and harder. But with God all things are possible.

As I see it, for a long time the pastor has been looked upon as the man who does "everything" in the church. Strong families allowed for this and the needs and demands pretty much worked themselves out. In the late 1960's the family started falling apart. The break up of the family led to more counseling time for the pastor along with a panorama of other demands. Congregations began to hire second pastors to help cover the basics, but the Bible-centeredness of the congregations was hurting for it. Although there are some long standing exceptions, the WELS congregations have just started to adjust their ministerium to the actual type of ministry demanded. This change of ministry is manifested in the team concept of multiple staff ministry beginning in the late 1970's.

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